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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4507
INFO RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE 0375
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9506
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6411
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4462
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3252
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0075
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3343
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0406
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2424
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6964
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4803
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1430

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LTTE "SEA TIGER" SUICIDE ATTACK ON
GALLE NAVAL BASE

REF: COLOMBO 1705 AND PREVIOUS

This message is sensitive but unclassified.

1. (SBU) Summary: On October 18, five "Sea Tiger" boats disguised as fishing craft attacked the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) base in Galle Harbor, in Sri Lanka's south. Two of the suicide boats detonated at the entrance to the harbor; the Navy destroyed the three others before they could do much damage. Two small SLN patrol craft were destroyed, but merchant craft apparently escaped serious damage. Two SLN sailors and two unidentified persons, probably port workers, were killed. 15 SLN sailors and 14 civilians were injured. The attack provoked angry demonstrations by Sinhalese gangs seeking revenge against Tamil residents and shops in Galle, but police quickly quelled the disturbances and placed Galle under curfew until 6 a.m. Thursday. End Summary.

Suicide Boats in Galle

2. (SBU) The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) Media Center for National Security confirmed that two Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "Sea Tiger" boats exploded at the entrance of the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) Headquarters at Galle Harbor on the early morning of October 18, destroying two SLN patrol craft. The Navy destroyed the remaining three suicide boats before they could detonate against targets. The suicide boats moved toward the naval base by hiding among fishing boats in the adjoining harbor. Military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe told pol FSN that two SLN sailors were killed. Security forces said that two unidentified bodies, initially thought to be LTTE suicide attackers, were probably port workers. 15 SLN sailors and 14 civilians were injured.

Tamilnet Touts Tiger Action

3. (SBU) The pro-LTTE Tamilnet website reported that a

"15-member attack team" approached the naval base in five boats, successfully detonating three suicide boats. The site did not specifically claim that it was an LTTE operation. The report added that amphibious attackers landed and fired RPG rounds into the SLN base, followed by a ground attack on the base lasting approximately two hours.

Police Avert Major Disturbances in Galle

¶4. (SBU) The LTTE attack sparked anti-Tamil demonstrations in predominantly Sinhalese Galle, 70 miles south of Colombo. Angry crowds gathered and reportedly threatened to set fire to Tamil businesses. The Associated Press reported that police wounded three people when firing on the demonstrators. However, Deputy Inspector General of police in Galle told us that his men had fired in the air, and denied reports of any wounded. In any case, the prompt police response seems to have averted a potential anti-Tamil riot. Authorities immediately imposed a curfew until 6 A.M. on October 19.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Neither the government nor the LTTE has yet pulled out of peace talks scheduled for October 28-29 in Geneva. With its first attack deep in the predominantly Sinhalese south since the signing of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, the LTTE clearly wants to send a message that it can still strike anywhere. The latest Tiger attack on a "southern" target, following a string of defeats at the hands of GSL security forces over the past two months, may reflect the LTTE's desire to approach the negotiating table from a stronger military and propaganda position. However, some observers believe that the LTTE aim is to provoke the

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government into withdrawing from the talks. Japanese Peace Envoy Akashi and Norwegian facilitator Hanssen-Bauer are both in Sri Lanka engaging the government and LTTE to try to keep new negotiating round in Geneva on track.
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